

**EXISTENTIAL – PHENOMENOLOGY IN PLACE OF
EMPIRICO – RATIONALISM:
A REAPPRAISAL OF THE ATTEMPT OF CAUCUS FOR
NEW POLITICAL SCIENCE**

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Modern behavioural political science has reached its saturating point and political scientists now talk of post behavioural era. In this so – called post behavioural era, the main challenge to behavioural political science has come from the left-oriented political scientists. In many respects, they represent a part of a unified left movement which includes the New Left, the Frankfurt school of Critical Theory, and Existential – Phenomenological School of Sartre and Merleau Ponty (Kaufmann, 1966). The purpose of this article, is to examine the existential – phenomenological approach to political analysis because it has become almost a fashion for those political scientists, who are opposed to behavioural political science, to use this approach as an alternative paradigm. For this purpose, I shall first sketch an outline of the philosophy of existential – phenomenology and then I shall make a reappraisal of a few works of political scientists of this persuasion.

Ethos of Existential – Phenomenology

Existential-Phenomenology represents two distinct but closely interrelated philosophical movements which share certain common philosophical attitudes and world view. Here existentialism provides substance, phenomenology provides method for understanding that substance. Existentialism is essentially a

reaction against Hegelian rationalism and empirical science. According to existentialism, Hegelianism leads to a romantic optimism by proclaiming the dictum that what is real is rational. The world is not so simple as to be understood by this empty slogan. Like wise, science is also incapable of grasping the experience which is met within the process of living, which is freedom.

Taking their cue from Henri Bergson, the existentialists claim that empirical scientific method achieves its results by a process of abstraction, in addition to laws and formulas which cannot unravel the mysteries of human existence. Thus, Kierkegaard proclaims the existential creed by positing that 'subjectivity is truth'. In his book, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1941) he justifies this statement by saying that every thing any one does, including his search for objective truth, gets its values from the way in which it is willed and decided by him. Kierkegaard claims that each individual person is unique and inexplicable in terms of any metaphysical or scientific system; he is a being who chooses as well as a being who thinks and contemplates; he is free, and because he is free he suffers; because future depends in part upon his free choices which are not predictable. Thus man is lonely but

he has freedom of choices by the help of which he exists as a separate and unique personality.

Other existentialists like Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Gabriel Marcel etc., follow Kierkegaard in their own way. Jaspers holds that the days of rational metaphysical system like that of Hegel have gone, but he sees the chief danger to individuality in the modern society which is technologically organised and in which the chief aim is to produce a standardised level of satisfaction for as many people as possible. Heidegger represents the pessimistic side of Kierkegaard's teaching and considers man as essentially lonely and finds himself cast into an unsympathetic world in which he tries to achieve purposes, all of which will inevitably come to nought in death. Man, according to him, can be true to himself only by living constantly with the thought of his eventual death. Sartre has given a most profound and, at the same time, the most atheistic account of existentialism. The basis of his work is the distinction between unconscious beings who are said to exist only in themselves and conscious beings who, because they transcend the present place and time and exist for themselves, are necessarily free. Against Sartrean existentialism, another French philosopher Marcel believes that Christianity and existentialism are compatible (Macquarrie, 1973).

From what we have seen above, it appears that existentialism is essentially a subjective philosophy. Here phenomenology comes to help it by providing it a rationale, an epistemology and a qualification. Phenomenology serves as a

'method' of providing existentialist contentions, because phenomenology is itself a reaction against rationalism and scientism. It claims to replace the empirical science by an eidetic science which is grounded in the Theory of Intentionality of Edmund Husserl who himself owes a great debt to the American philosopher — psychologist William James for his concept of radical empiricism and intentionality (Edie, 1970: 481 – 526). William James in his Principles of psychology represents 'phenomenological break through; and he is credited to have discovered; the law of the intentionality of consciousness (Wilshire, 1968). In a weak sense, intentionality means that all consciousness is consciousness of something, that consciousness is world directed, and deals with entities or objects transcendent to itself. In this sense. James was the first to launch the notion that consciousness is temporarily flowing 'streams' of experience which continually change, grow and merge with one another; one could grasp those mental acts- feeling or thoughts- by introspection and then correlate them with their 'cause'. But every time he tried to grasp such a mental act the only thing he could fix clearly in mind was its object. In this way, he discovered that no mental act could be specified except through its object (Edie, 1970; 498-499). He denies the duality of mind and its function, i.e., the recognition by it of this object — the main premise of empirical psychology or even empirical science. In other words, he gives the call for the recognition of 'thing — in — itself' which has become the catch-call of phenomenology.

Husserl developed the theory of intentionality further and used it as hypotheses conceived to explain how knowledge of the exterior world is possible for the mind. According to Husserl, consciousness cannot be conceived as a kind of matter. The real nature of consciousness is intentionality; that is, the mind, is nothing more than 'intention', not intention as the word usually understood, but intention as a sort of turning toward reality of the object which is always present in the consciousness. But Husserl also talks of transcendental consciousness as distinguished from its transcendent counterpart, the object of the real world, which is the basis of his 'transcendental idealism'. according to which transcendental objects - objects of the real world - not only owe their being known but also their very being to transcendental consciousness (Manivasagar, 1993:9)

This conclusion of Husserl has not been accepted by existential-phenomenologists who are opposed to this 'metaphysical' attitude of Husserl because it goes against their activism and atheistic interpretation of human existence and worldly phenomenon. To E.W. Knight, Husserl's attitude towards the world remains essentially a contemplative one before we can behave towards things, we have to understand them. For the Existential phenomenologists, however, our conduct in the world is our understanding of it, one is inseparable from the other. By preferring to remain a method for the identification of essence, phenomenology made the existential dissidence inevitable. "Existentialist grew out of an impatience

with phenomenology for what it remains ... in general phenomenology continues to regard knowing as the condition of acting" (Knight, 1962:54-285)

Existential Phenomenologists believe in the dictum of Sartre that 'existence precedes essence'. Since existence is reality action cannot wait till the essence of existence is known. Existential phenomenology thus calls for immediate action because man is free and is responsible for whatever he does but time is short and he has to choose in this shorter period of time which extends to his own life. Therefore, following Sartre, existential phenomenology emphasises voluntarism and indeter-minism; they do not believe in human nature which would define in advance what man is or what he might become if all his potentialities are realised (Fierce, 1986: 148 - 184).

Attempts for caucus for New Political Science

The language of Post behavioural political scientists abounds in words like 'life world', 'intentionality', 'essence', 'relevance to social and political reality'. Many have adopted this language without caring much about a systematic exposition of the existential phenomenological philosophy. But some of them, mostly the members of Caucus for New Political Science under American Political Science Association, have seriously tried to utilise existential - phenomenology as an alternative paradigm for their New Political Science. We shall confine to the writing of two of them i.e., 'Michael Weinstein and Hwa Yol Jung, although scholars

like Theodore Lowi and Henry Kariel have also made important contributions in this field.

Michael Weinstein in his article "New Ways and old to Talk about Politics" (1973) starts with a mission. He calls empirical political science 'Newtonian' and the so-called 'New Political Science' a modernist political science. He claims that in modern times, the concept of science has changed implying that the

scientific deterministic theory has become dated. It is a typical indeterministic or voluntaristic or libertarian belief which tries to reject unsuccessfully, the importance of theory of causality stems from Newton's scientific philosophy. He gives Dewey and Bentley the credit for establishing the new 'transnationalist science'. The theoretical structure of his essay may be presented in the following way:

| Modes of coordinating knowing and known. | Corresponding mode of thought | Corresponding bases of the expression of Political thought |
|--|--|---|
| Dewey and Bentley. | Hugo Engelmann. | Heinrich Rommen. |
| Self - action | Scholasticism (essence) | Natural Law Theory |
| Interaction | Newtonianism (Causal interaction phenomena) | Theory of particularistic interdependence |
| Transaction | Modernism(Manifold transactive relationship) | New political thought dealing with human conditions and public situation. |

In this highly original framework, Weinstein invokes the help of the three different sources. He starts with a particular epistemology preferred by Dewey and Bentley in which they have constructed their different modes of coordinating and the known-self-action, interaction and transaction. According to him, the framework of self- action views things as acting under their powers; interaction interprets things as balanced against in causal interconnection and transaction uses system of description and naming to deal with aspects and phases

of action with out final attribution to elements. Now, he connects these three modes of knowing and known with three modes of thought by invoking the help of Hugo Engleman who, according to Weinstein, connects action with scholasticism whose main concern was to find out the essence of nature; interaction with Newtonianism which has sought to find out causal relation in every phenomena whether physical natural or social; and transaction with modernism according to which the universe is a self - contained process, the

basic characteristics of which manifest themselves in the constantly shifting structure and arrangement of empirical phenomena. Lastly, he quotes Heinrich Rommen to the effect that scholasticism has given birth to natural law theory. Newtonianism to theories of particularistic independence (Mackenzie, 1967: 41-45) and modernism to the new and revolutionary theories which he supports.

These modernistic theories attempt to deal with the inner meaning of human life by analysing human condition an unmistakably Sartrean belief. Weinstein mercifully leaves Natural Law Theory because he thinks it is almost dead with the death of individualistic liberalism. But he pours his fullest fury on Newtonianism which is based upon causal interactionism and declares empirical political science has produced theories of particularistic independence which are mutually antagonistic, mechanistic, deterministic and relativistic (Weinstein, 1973: 41-45). Among the theories of particularistic independence, he includes both Marxism and pluralistic constitutionalism and declares them out of date along with Newtonianism and, perhaps, entire empiricism as developed by different philosophers from John Locke to Carl Hempel and others.

Thus it becomes apparent that existentialism is the most modernist thought and theories bases upon it, which are unfortunately very few, are able to deliver man from his socioeconomic suffering and alienation. In this category of the modernist theories, Weinstein includes pragmatism, civilised humanism (or Marxist

humanism or theories of the New Left) and of course, above all, existentialism, which together constitute a 'movement' which attempt to create comprehensive interpretation of human experience by paying wholesale attention to 'public situation' and 'human conditions'.

In this book, *The Political Experience* (1972) Weinstein is more explicit and down to earth and does not claim overtly a scientific status for his own paradigm. He defines public situation as "the larger environment in which he (man) lives and acts" (Weinstein, 1972:1). According to him, the political scientists should analyse and make recommendations about the public situation by dividing the political process into four broad phases-policy, decisions, administration, and evaluation. (Weinstein, 1972: 1). He recommends five 'standards' with which political scientists should examine the above four phases of political process - accuracy, consistency, comprehensiveness, felt adequacy and fruitfulness (Weinstein, 1972:3).

To Weinstein, accuracy means the rejection of hypotheses about human conditions and judgement by their factual accuracy. Consistency means the finding out of the consistency about statements of human conditions. Comprehensiveness means examination of human conditions. Comprehensiveness means examination of human condition or public situation as a whole. Felt adequacy means full comprehension of human conditions by the students of human conditions according to their own belief, mental measurement and values which is what the psychologists call 'judgement based upon empathy'

Fruitfulness pertains to the students value preference or in other words, its image gives rise to new possibilities for acting to transform the public situation. It is the justification for activism on the part of scholars and academicians which has become a hall – mark of some of the universities in America.

Thus, Weinstein applies the standard of existentialism in the sphere of political science and presents a philosophy of 'Social Praxis' which was so dear to C Wright Mills, Alvin Gouldner, etc., although his epistemology differs from that of Mills and his followers. Yet, by and large he shares prophetic tones and futurism of Mills and his associates.

With this scheme in his mind, Weinstein divides his book of readings into six parts. The first two include writings respectively about human condition and nature of politics. The rest four parts include writings about the above mentioned four phases of Political writings of various scholars of differing and contradictory views and his editorial comments invariably support those scholars who have followed his five standards in delineating human conditions from adequacy, that is, those who have tried to follow the norms of existential phenomenology, libertarianism and the New Left.

Hwa yol Jung in his oft-quoted article, *The Political Relevance of Existential Phenomenology* (1971) appears to be a moderate advocate. He is not in favour of a radical break with empirical political science and in fact, he wishes to retain many of its features. He lauds Eulau's views contained in his book, *Behavioural Persuasion in Politics*

(1963) that behavioural political science is concerned with man, that it pays attention to "conditions and consequences of human action" and that along with scientific objectivity behavioural political science recognised the utility of inter – subjectivity, and finally, that the distinct merit of the behavioural persuasion is its focus on the meaning of human behaviour (Jung, 1971:551-552). But he lets the cat come out of the bag when he comes to different conclusions. He categorically asserts that all the evils of empirical political science lie in its use of the methodology of natural sciences and its abstract assumptions regarding the nature of political phenomena based upon naturalistic determinism.

These two points are central to Jung's whole thesis and around them he weaves the texture of his entire essay. These are based upon his beliefs in two distinct characteristics of existential phenomenology, indeterminism or voluntarism and Husserl's concept of intentionality which posits that objective phenomena reside in the consciousness of man because human consciousness is consciousness of something and, therefore, it is futile to assume the existence of objective phenomena, rather we should directly approach the things – in – themselves. But the view that science in general and political science in particular should not use the methods of natural sciences which is based upon the indeterministic belief that voluntary behavior emanates from and is directed by the life world or what Husserl calls, the 'Lebenswelt'. Therefore, to Jung human actions and behaviours are manifestations of 'lived experience' – a concept

which has been derived from Kierkegaard's dictum that 'subjectivity is truth'. His second conclusion is based upon his belief in Husserl's concept of intentionality and its various forms modified by Heidegger, Max Scheler, Merleau-Ponty, Alfred Schutz etc.

A Reappraisal

No doubt, attempts of Caucus for New Political Science contain some important insight and present some striking standards of evaluation. It appears that Weinstein's attack is successful and he has been able to create impressive thought-structures against the empirical political science. We shall welcome as Jung believes, the contribution of phenomenology, if it adds new insight into the philology of politics, and if it becomes a source of the descriptive disclosure of the intentional meaning of human action and sociality. (Jung, 1972:47). But then it cannot be useful as a method; it can only add to our descriptive knowledge from which we can draw hypotheses in order to gain probably knowledge of the ultimate meaning of human existence.

The works of Weinstein and Jung have been subjected to severe criticism in the hands of behavioural political scientists. To them, existential phenomenology is a manifest irrationalism and speculative philosophy upon which social sciences cannot be established. The scientific social science is by nature problem solving and it requires the scientific determinism according to which the "human behaviour is inspired by the view that man is an integral part and product of nature and that his

behaviour can reasonably be held to exhibit scientifically ascertainable regularities...." (Grunbaum, 1971: 299 - 317)

Critics point out that a closer scrutiny reveals disjoints in Weinstein's arguments and his arbitrariness in choosing disparate facts for the purpose of arguments for arguments' sake. In examining the Weinstein's argument many doubts appear in the minds of critics. For example, Weinstein puts in the mouths of Dewey and Bentley such arguments which they would not have made. For one thing, Dewey was a Positivist of a sort. He did not accept the indispensability of logic in the process of induction which Newton finds essential. He did not give much importance to the theory of causality of causative interaction, nor did he deny the usefulness of it. On the contrary, in the process of inquiry he called it a 'leading principle'. He believed like Kant, that law of causality resides in human mind, and not in the nature or natural phenomena themselves.

Thus, behavioural political scientists hold that it is not a denial of the law of causality itself, but rather a refinement of the same. In modern science, similarly laws of causality and its resultant scientific determinism are treated as tool and a way of looking at and understanding of phenomena whether natural, physical or social. And as a tool, and as a method, it cannot be replaced by Husserlian intentionality, Jamesian radical empiricism or Sartrean existentialism. In the words of Brecht, "Twentieth century scientific method continues to work with the concept of causal relationship or its equivalent both

in natural and social sciences (Brecht, 1977:80). To behaviouralists what Weinstein calls 'modernist science' is no science at all but the very anti - thesis of all that science stands for.

The second doubt comes in the critic's mind Weinstein regards the so-called Newtonianism as non-modern while existentialism as a 'modernist science' for him; it appears that he must have meant an altogether different definition of science but he does not spell it out. The trouble is that all his mentors like Sartre, Merleau., - Ponty, Max Scheler etc., have honestly denied that they believe in science. They simply deny the utility of science but do not claim to have established any new science. It is argued that Weinstein's so - called 'transactionist modernist science' is a nonentity and his insistence upon it is clearly hypocritical.

Thirdly, it is said that the so-called theories of particularistic independence' are inadequate in analysing the causes of human suffering and that they have not succeeded in tackling the relevant problems of society like the questions of socio - economic exploitation, the problem of minority, human alienation etc. However, many have serious doubts whether these problems can be adequately analysed and appropriate solutions found by irrational and subjective methods of existentialism and phenomenology. Uptill now, socio - economic and political reforms have been possible only by scientific discoveries and scientific thoughts and actions. What in the name of analysing human conditions and situations has been done in America forces any sensible man to despair. Belz

goes to the extent to criticise that in American Universities some left - wing scholars have openly advocated violence, disobedience and anti - constitutionalism. Writings of scholars like Herbert Marcuse, shelden Wolin, John Scholar, Henry Kariel, peter Bacharch, David Ketler, Barber Pranger and many others- most of them of the members of the so-called caucus for New Political Science - attest to the sad misuse of academic freedom. Human conditions and situations cannot be analysed by breaking heads but rather by uniting heads by patient and scientific inquiry. That this could have been possible is partly because of the very existence of plurastic constitutionalism in America and partly because all the catch words of these scholars like 'human conditions'. 'Public situations' are vague (Belz, 1971: 251-265)

Weinstein in his article "The Inclusive Polity; New Directions of Political Theory" (1973) believes that advocates of new political theory will not undertake empirical research, but rather will become actively involved in social movements, teach "skills of criticism to large number of people" and engage in "philosophical investigation in to the structure of openness, integrity and self - knowledge" (Brecht, 1977:79-80). In this way, Weinstein rejects sobriety and scientific study or activism and philosophy which is irrationslistic. And he realises the shortcomings of his approach and confesses that "no systematic modernist political theory has yet been developed and for this he concludes that "many aspects or current empirical theories will be useful in constructing such a theory (Weinstein,

1973: 372). He prefers organisation theory, elite theory and modified system theory. But doubt creeps into our mind as to how these theories can go along with Weinstein's preference for existentialism which denies the modern epistemology in its totality. Again, he is very kind to functional analysis as a method but he immediately tags it with existential psychology (Weinstein, 1973: 59). We do not know whether these are meant to attract new recruits or to lure the credulous.

By the same token, Jung's attempt which was mainly based upon the ideas of Husserl, was criticised. By giving the call to go to the things themselves, by the use of the method of intentionality, Husserl wanted to describe only phenomena that were generally human. But he did not engage in any effort to prove the generality. In the experience described he did not delve into any specific empirical research on this count. All the most, this is a tacit assumption of obviousness in this respect. When we do find his illustrations of immediate evidence convincing, it is because of some specific non-controversial elements in our activities of thinking, perception, remembering, imagination and the like, and because it seems obvious that no human being functions differently. Should there appear differences in the experiences of different individuals, Husserl's methods would not provide us with any means to decide between alternatives. Everyone would be right in referring to his own immediate evidence, but every one would be right only for himself" (Brecht, 1997:381). It is in this light that Pievecic accuses Husserl of failing to

solve the problem of other people which according to him is due to the fact that phenomenology in general fails to solve the problem of clarifying the status of science and scientific knowledge in relation to philosophy (Pievecic, 1970:147)

On the contrary, science is modest in its claims because it treats all knowledge as probable and from this modest hope it tries to understand the phenomenon—both natural and human—on the basis of certain assumptions and hypotheses. These assumptions are pre-scientific inasmuch as it can take into account by the help of intuitions and observed facts—all the essences of phenomena which phenomenologists think essential for knowing the nature of phenomena (Colling, 1952). In fact, behaviouralism in social sciences is considerably modified today. All the existential—phenomenologists treat empirical studies as based upon logical positivism and dogmatic neopositivism as represented by Rudolf Carnap and Otto Neurath. In modern social sciences, especially in sociology and Political Science, it is said that the use of techniques like sample survey, content analysis, etc., at best bases upon the belief that subjective data is objectively observable, recordable and measurable. Moreover, in the place of scientific objectivity the use and importance of inter-subjectivity is now an established of fact.

In short, existential phenomenology has failed to place an alternative paradigm contrary to the empirico-national paradigm of behavioural political science. This however, does not mean that existential—phenomenology has no relevance to political studies. It

can serve its purpose as a critical social theory and produce such standards of evaluation as will be used to measure the achievements and failings of scientific political theory. The main weakness of existential – phenomenology lies in its dogmatic rejection of the relationship between science and philosophy. An ideal philosophy subsumes science in its scheme. The philosophy of Whitehead in the west and that of Aurobindo in the east represent this synthesis between science and philosophy. In a lesser degree, the critical theory of Frankfurt school of Horkheimer, Adorno and Habermas has also tried to affect this synthesis. It is because of this that Frankfurt School has produced more meaningful theories than existential phenomenological school.

In recent years Neo-Kantians are dissatisfied both with phenomenology and positivism and think that only Kant's approach leads to correct appraisal of human knowledge. Neo – Kantianism also known as neo-criticism, represents an intellectual movement during nineteenth century and even today in a different manner – a new critical look at epistemology and methodology of science both natural and social (Manivasagar, 1992: 28-30). The supporters of this movement talk of going back to Kantian epistemology and philosophy. The Neo-Kantians have two essential reasons for going back to Kant as their intellectual forbear. They find in him critical spirit, which is averse to any kind of dogmatism and at the same time allowed an understanding of the relation between the particular sciences and philosophy, which made possible to think out the new pressing problems of

the relation of the sciences to one another. There were other Kantian themes like the autonomy of practical reason, freedom and morality, which played a part in the resurrection of Kantian epistemology.

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